DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 409 407 UD 031 799

AUTHOR	Ratteray, Joan Davis
TITLE	How Much Is Too Much? Charters, Vouchers, and Corporate Philanthropy. Policy Alternatives in School Choice and the Economic Foundations of Independent Community-Based Schools. Policy Studies on Education.
INSTITUTION	Institute for Independent Education, Inc., Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	97
NOTE	36p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Institute for Independent Education, 1313 North Capitol Street, N.E., Washington, DC 20002 ($10).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Evaluative (142)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Charter Schools; Community Involvement; *Community Schools; Economic Factors; Educational Change; Educational Finance; *Educational Vouchers; Elementary Secondary Education; *Private Financial Support; Private Schools; School Business Relationship; *School Choice; Urban Schools
IDENTIFIERS	Reform Efforts

ABSTRACT

In recent years the Institute for Independent Education has begun to study a significant parental response to the lack of options in education. Parents of color and those with low to moderate incomes are creating and supporting independent community-based schools as self-help resources for the educational needs of their children. These schools, community-based in that they are operated by community organizations and in focus on the community, have focused on three major activities in response to rebuilding needed education reform efforts in their communities. They have been responsible for leadership development, educational innovation, and economic revitalization in urban communities throughout the United States. Charter school mandates have become very attractive to the independent community-based schools, and teachers's unions are beginning to support the concept of charter schools. In Michigan, Massachusetts, and Washington, D.C., independent community-based schools have applied for charter school status. To help support independent schools, many people advocate the use of educational vouchers. A second strategy for developing greater awareness of independent community-based schools is through contractual service agreements in which the school is chosen by competition for a contract. Private enterprise is increasing its role in sponsoring vouchers in the form of scholarships and in providing other sources of support for independent community-based schools. Corporations and community-based independent schools share an interest in developing human beings to their highest potential, so it is logical that they should work together for educational opportunity. (Contains 14 references.) (SLD)

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Policy Studies on Education

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How Much is *Too Much*?

Charters, Vouchers, and Corporate Philanthropy

Policy alternatives in school choice and the economic foundations of independent community-based schools

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Published by the

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Washington, DC 20002
Phone (202) 745–0500; Fax (202) 745–9298

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Printed in the United States of America

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Acknowledgements

The Institute for Independent Education is grateful for the assistance of the following Institute Internship Associates in the research and writing of this report:

Angelique Grays, James Madison College, Michigan State University, who interviewed community-based school administrators;
Gerard Baptiste, Howard University Law School, who "surfed" the Internet to gather current information on charter and voucher legislation; and
Kristi Eisenhauer, James Madison College, Michigan State University, who helped with the typing of the manuscript;

The following friends of the Institute also contributed to this publication:

Oswald Ratteray, Commission on Higher Education, Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, who edited the final report; and
Verne Oliver, The Gilder Foundation, who provided some of the funds for printing the report

How Much Is Too Much?
Charters, Vouchers, and Corporate Philanthropy

The current debates on school choice focus on the creation of charter schools and the passage of tax-supported voucher legislation. Corporate America, politicians, educators, and parents recognize the need for more choices in learning environments that can accommodate America's diverse school-age populations. The school choice debates, regardless of partisan politics, are about options, variety and freedom.

While these alternatives are beginning to have an impact on the political, economic and social climate of independent community-based schools, they raise important issues for the continued survival and independence of private institutions. In addition, while corporate philanthropy traditionally has been marshalled to support public education and, in particular, to keep African American and other non-Whites under the influence of public education, corporate philanthropy has yet to achieve its real promise of supporting independence from government control in a "free enterprise" society.

The Independent School Movement

For the past 12 years, the Institute for Independent Education has chronicled the efforts of a little known grassroots movement that has become a significant parental response to the lack of options in education. Parents of color and/or parents with low to moderate incomes are creating and supporting independent community-based schools as self-help responses to the educational needs of their children that are not being met by large government/public school or traditional private school systems. These schools are meeting the academic, social, and cultural needs of African American, Hispanic/Latino American, Native American and Asian American children all across the country.

What Are Independent Community-Based Schools?

Independent community-based schools are often community-inspired creations that provide an institutional response to public systems that are out of control in their response to community needs. Committed administrators, teachers, and parents became disillusioned with the status quo in which a majority of African American or Hispanic/Latino youth have been mislabeled, mistreated, misinformed or devalued in the traditional schooling process. These individuals responded by building institutions that can offset some of the bureaucratic institutional inertia that is seen in so many large inner city public schools. Outdated testing and placement policies often victimized students and prompted parents to seek alternatives in schooling environments. Parents, who are taking back control over the educational fate of their youngsters, continue to respond by establishing their own schools in spite of tremendous odds.

The schools are termed "community-based" for two major reasons. First, they are operated by community organizations, churches or mosques, where parents of the youth enrolled in these schools are heavily involved in the life of the school, and the schools have developed a closely-knit neighborhood-

like character. Second, the term community-based serves to distinguish these schools from traditional private schools, which tend to be part of an organized parochial school system or to serve predominantly affluent families.

There are over 400 independent community-based schools located in America's cities. The schools draw most of their enrollment from the African American communities, with considerable smaller percentages of these schools serving Hispanic/Latino Americans and Native American youth. However, the schools serve approximately 70,000 African American students in 30 states, the District of Columbia, and the Virgin Islands.

What Is the Historical Context for These Schools?

Independent community-based schools have been part of the educational landscape in the United States for over 200 years. In the 1790s, Prince Hall opened the first of these types of school in his son's basement for African American youth who were harassed in the Boston Common schools. Since then, these schools have continued to grow in cycles, depending upon the trend of the political mainstream for segregation or integration in both the North and the South in the United States.

Other benchmarks include the use of an underground railroad to develop schools before the Civil War, the Jim Crow era, the severe inequitable tax support for separate schools, and the promising era of desegregation after the 1954 U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*. The modern increase in the number of these schools began with the struggle by teachers' unions in the 1960s against communities for the control of public schools as well as during and after the "Black power movement" of the 1960s and 1970s, which once again raised concerns about the academic plight of African Americans in public school systems.

The change in the values and lack of discipline in big city schools in the 1980s gave rise to another increase in community-based schools. Parents and educators complained about the social and cultural environment of public schools and the segregation of the masses of African American students in tracks of special education and non-specialized school curricula that invaded many large inner-city schools. There also were some parochial schools that closed their doors to African American students because many of the parishoners had moved to the suburbs and taken their financial support with them. Parents felt they were losing their community infrastructure with the traditional public and parochial schools, and they felt a real need to re-knit the community fabric for successful schooling through the independent community-based school. Today, these schools continue to grow and the parent constituency in inner cities are finding new ways to express their distrust of the current educational delivery system. For example, parents in Wisconsin organized to create a new school district so that they could control the programs, services, and goods needed to provide a quality education for children.[1]

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[1] In 1987, a plan was introduced to make North Division School District of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, a separate majority-black school district. State Representative Annette Polly Williams, community activists such as former School Superintendent Howard Fuller, and many parents supported a proposal for 10 schools, serving over 6,000 students. This district would enable the students to increase their achievement through better school management in a smaller system that would provide greater attention to the specific needs of the children. Representative Williams reintroduced that proposal early in 1996.

Recent developments in some areas, such as an attempt by parents in the Fort Worth School District in Texas to withdraw from the district and start their own school district, have been described by critics as "secessionist" (Potok, 1996: 4D). On the other hand, they reveal the true frustration of parents with the options provided by the state and city. Such activism undoubtedly will continue to surface, as parents show that they are determined to triumph in their quest for quality education.

The role of the independent community-based school is sometimes smeared with the "secessionist" label, even though the response of these families is not an attempt to balkanize or hyphenate the American educational landscape. It is a process by which families are redefining a community constituency for quality education, and they are establishing common ground on which they can stand as they demand what they expect from the schooling process at diverse schools in cities and towns across America.

What Is the Focus of the Independent Community-based School?

The school choice phenomenon has brought into sharp focus how much our highly bureaucratic educational systems are no longer in tune with the needs and wishes of many inner-city communities.

An earlier Institute study, known as *Dare to Choose*, indicated that parents and educators are seeking environments that nurture the human spirit, provide a foundation for learning values and provide solid academic preparation (Ratteray and Shujaa, 1987). From recent surveys, they are seeking or building these environments in record numbers (Institute for Independent Education, 1990). The independent community schools enroll the second largest number of African American youth outside the public school system, exceeded only by African Americans in the Roman Catholic school system.

Studies by the Institute for Independent Education indicate that independent community-based schools have focused on three major activities in response to rebuilding needed education reform efforts in their communities. They have been responsible for leadership development, educational innovation, and economic revitalization in many urban communities across the United States.

A: LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Independent community-based schools produce leaders by strengthening administrators as entrepreneurs in education, developing the academic and social skills of students, empowering parents to make choices, and supporting continued parental involvement in these schools.

Entrepreneurs

Families, community organizations, churches, and businesses have been at the forefront in creating these schools. As a consequence of this entrepreneurship, these schools have become an integral part of the enterprise infrastructure of their communities. The experience helps educators gain skills and, in turn, shape the will of a community to support its own institutions.

As educational reform movements begin to shape the debate on what is an appropriate mission for an educational institution, these entrepreneurs in education rise to the occasion, gather the additional information they need, and begin planning what their institutions will look like in the changing school marketplace. These schools should be seen as laboratories that help to promote executive leadership in increasingly diverse urban school populations.

Ethnographic data gathered by the Institute demonstrate that these entrepreneurs have a sense of mission. For example, one educator, who started a tutoring center that later became a five-day school, observed that children of affluent families avoid being labeled and placed in special education classes, mainly because they receive tutoring when it is needed. This entrepreneur explored the possibility of providing that type of service to African-American families in their neighborhoods. She found that while the families were interested in tutoring, it often was difficult to locate tutors. Nevertheless, she decided to do it:

> [F]rom 3 to 6 on Sunday...I would keep the students like an hour...[T]hen I would have them three at a time...And when I was testing the children, I saw that some of these children hadn't been taught...[P]eople were referring them (to be) mentally retarded. They were not mentally retarded; they were educationally retarded." [Ratteray and Shujaa, 1987: 83]

These educators have found a tremendous gap in the current educational system, where millions of children of color are not being taught. In hundreds of inner-city communities, there is a disproportionate number of poor and children of color in public school special education classes that should have an opportunity to be taught properly, instead of being labeled, year after year, as dysfunctional human beings.

Student Development

One Institute study found that students generally scored above national norms on five standardized commercial tests: California Achievement Test [CAT], Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills [CTBS], Iowa Tests of Basic Skills [ITBS], Metropolitan Achievement Test [MAT], and the Stanford Achievement Test [Stanford] (Institute for Independent Education, 1991: 41).

The schools can be grouped into four major categories, reflecting how they cope with different learning styles, backgrounds, areas of redemption, and advanced skills. There are schools with a large number of high-performing students, those with a normal distribution of students, "multimodal" schools that have significant numbers peaking at different points on a distribution curve, and schools with large numbers of low-performing students. In spite of these differences, the schools still develop students with accomplishments in reading and mathematics.

Statistically, there is a high standard deviation within each grade level. This reflects wide variability in the range of skills among students caused by differences in student preparation for the schooling environment. For example, for a class of 12 students in grade 6 has a mean of 50.92 and a standard deviation of 31.27, with individual percentile ranked scores ranging from a low of 1 to a high of 99 (Institute for Independent Education, 1991: 45).

This level of diversity would result in an academic disaster if teachers utilized only standard pedagogical techniques. In larger bureaucratic schools, the students who are not the main focus of a teacher's attention—whether they are at the low-performing or the high-performing group in the classroom—tend to get lost. However, independent community-based schools offer positive learning contexts that can make the difference between success and failure. More students could be placed in such settings if the choice debate were expanded to focus on the progress that individual students can make.

Studies show that graduates of independent community-based schools believed that the schools they attended contributed to the strength of their character and effectively prepared them for college, further schooling, or employment in the workforce. They were eager to recommend the schools they attended to others because of the school climate, curricula, teachers, policies, and the fact that the schools affirmed their cultural background. Moreover, the respondents indicated that they would send their own children to those schools, join an alumni organization, and be prepared to give back to the school in some tangible way.

Parental Involvement

The Institute found, in *Dare to Choose*, that parental empowerment was very evident among low-to-moderate income families (Ratteray and Shujaa, 1987: 158–170). Thousands of families appear to make great sacrifices to exercise the freedom of choice, and more families might begin to choose the best learning environments for their children if more opportunities were available. The factors that parents cited most as influencing their decision to choose an independent school are the learning environments, the academic programs, and the affirmation of ethnic culture and religious values in these schools.

Most of these schools do not have strong marketing programs. Therefore, families hear about these schools from other families, community groups, or churches. Families often realize that government schools are not supporting many of the cultural or religious values they are seeking, and they are willing to do something about it. While popular myth suggests that low-income families do not usually want to help themselves, the families at independent community-based schools are sending the signal that there is a great deal of positive energy in communities that can reverse the educational decline seen in many inner cities. Because they must personally investigate these schools, families become informed consumers of educational opportunities and have a better understanding of the value of competition between school programs.

For example, there is more support for parental choice through vouchers from the African-American population than among the general population. According to the Joint Center for Political Studies (1996: 12), 47.9 percent of respondents in a survey supported school choice, in contrast to 43.7 percent who opposed it. African-American women favored school vouchers by 51.1 percent yes to 38.5 percent no. A substantial proportion of younger African Americans (63.9 percent, 18 to 25 years of age) favored vouchers, compared to 28.1 percent of African Americans over 65 years of age.

B. EDUCATIONAL INNOVATION

Against great odds, these independent community-based schools are making learning happen. Often in spite of a lack of resources—materials, physical plant, high tuition, or large endowments—these institutions are keeping students safe while in school, helping students to perform above national norms on tests of basic skills in reading and mathematics, and culturally and socially affirming students in nurturing environments.

These actions can be described as innovative at a time when most of the stories emanating from inner-city schools are dismal. The gap in achievement between Whites and the masses of children of color is still significant. Innovation in these schools occurs in the form of teaching strategies, enrollment policies, culture and values, and responsiveness to the community.

Teaching Strategies

Teachers meet the needs of diverse ability groups so as to keep small groups of students academically and socially productive. The schools appear to work on the premise that children can learn, no matter the circumstances in which they are found. This outlook provides a great deal of flexibility in the teacher's approach to teaching. It may be critical in reaching students and meeting their particular learning needs in sufficient time to make a real difference in their later schooling years.

Enrollment Policies

Highly selective admissions criteria are not used to keep students out of these independent schools. As a result, families are not discouraged and feel there is no hope for the placement of their children. This context is coupled with the high expectations that students can be taught to move from where the teacher finds them to a higher plane of self-expression and academic development. Such sentiment is found not only among alumni and parents but with administrators as well (Ratteray and Shujaa, 1987; Institute for Independent Education, 1991).

Culture and Values

The alumni of independent community-based schools highlight the fact that these schools affirm the ethnic culture and/or religious values of the students' families. The warm family-like atmosphere was often cited by students as a characteristic of these schools. It made them, as African Americans, feel comfortable and secure. Many of these schools enroll students up to the 8th grade, so that students often go to more integrated settings or to larger settings in later schooling years. Nearly one-half of these parents choose religiously-affiliated independent neighborhood schools because religious values are affirmed in these settings.

Responsiveness to the Community

Most of the independent community-based schools were founded during the era of widespread protests that occurred after World War II against social inequalities for people of color in the United States. The educators who created these schools did so out of their own mission to respond to the needs of their communities, especially in light of what students were not getting in the traditional public schools. They believed that they could bring academic excellence into their communities, teach self-discipline, provide safe havens for children, and yet keep their schools affordable to most families. They continue to develop their institutions in light of their original goal to help students be proud of their cultural heritage and to uphold moral standards of behavior. The evidence that they are meeting community needs today is reflected in the size of their waiting lists at many of these schools and the strong support and involvement of parents in school life.

More children of color will need to be encouraged to work at their top potential to keep America economically, socially, and technologically competitive. This means that innovative environments, such as those offered by these independent schools, must be seen as beginning frameworks to design quality education that can bring the masses of African-American and Hispanic/Latino-American youth into the 21st century with greater school success.

C. ECONOMIC REVITALIZATION

Very few policymakers have examined the school choice issue from the vantage point of their role in the economic revitalization of communities. The economic characteristics of choice as it relates to independent community-based schools include low-to-modest tuition cost for quality educational outcomes, a direct fiscal benefit for state and local educational agencies, institution building in inner-city communities, and services which benefit families that have little mobility.

Low Tuition and Family Incomes

These independent schools generally receive most of their operating revenue from tuition. Modest tuition range from $1,200 to $2,500, which makes these schools affordable to many inner-city families and is unique among private schools nationwide.

Few schools receive help from foundations or businesses. They receive between 2 to 3 percent of their revenues from these types of sources. This may be due, in large part, to the fact that struggling institutions cannot afford the personnel and time necessary to raise funds from these sources. Nevertheless, their students are being prepared for college and the workplace, mostly through the support they receive from their client families.

The common belief that all private schools serve only elite families is not valid for independent community-based schools, where many children of color primarily come from low-income and working class families. Approximately 57 percent of the families who send their children to these schools tend to have four or five members, with total earnings of less than $30,000 (Ratteray and Shujaa, 1987: 109). In fact, 87 percent earn less than $50,000, and only 13 percent earn more than $50,000.

Data also show that there is a broad mix of parents with different levels of education. Most mothers (59 percent) reported having occupations that did not require much specialized training, including factory workers, machine operators, students, painters, practical nurses, postal clerks, transit workers, case managers, laborers, and real estate associates. A smaller group (39 percent) included registered nurses, teachers, police officers, accountants, ministers, health educators, and librarians. Among fathers, 48 percent reported unspecialized occupations, and 28 percent had more specialized occupations.

These families help to keep economic stability in inner-city neighborhoods. The choice debate can stimulate discussions and decisions among families to start schools or choose schools in neighborhoods that can improve the community infrastructure. In poor neighborhoods, active families can become a powerful catalyst for educational change and productivity.

Benefits to State and Local Governments

Since independent community-based schools enroll at least 70,000 African American youngsters, their existence results in savings of $367.2 million to state and local governments, which otherwise would be required to spend an average of $5,247 for each of these students in public school systems. In addition, these youngsters often come from low-income working families, and they are gaining skills that will enable them to become productive tax-paying citizens.

State and local governments also benefit by having a pool of experienced teachers from which they frequently draw. Teachers at independent community-based schools often earn much lower salaries than their public system and other private school counterparts. One study indicates that, on average, teachers remain in independent neighborhood schools for three years (Institute for Independent Education, 1991: 31, Fig. 4). Therefore, these institutions become career stepping stones for teachers who move elsewhere, taking with them the experience of successful education in challenging environments.

Institution Building

Independent neighborhood schools are economic enterprises that stimulate entrepreneurship in economically-depressed communities. Even though these costs are never calculated in the value of school choice initiatives, these schools can add to the economic vitality of a community in the number of full and part-time jobs for teachers, including retired teachers, as well as other workers and small business services. They keep families as stakeholders in the community, which in turn help to bring businesses and services for their needs.

One example, of a school that has become economically revitalized is Providence-St. Mel, which enrolls over 600 students from first grade to 12th grade. Providence-St. Mel had been a Roman Catholic diocesan school for over half a century. When it was on the verge of closing, parents took up the mantle in 1978, turned it into a community-based school, and adopted the theme, "A school that will not die". Under the leadership of Paul Adams, it operates a solid academic program, a McDonald's franchise, and a community development organization that is building housing units.

Many other independent schools have expanded their school infrastructure to assist their communities with small businesses. The idea is to show students why and how to make the educational process work in real life.

Community Service Outreach

The students, teachers, and parents also use services within the community, such as tutorial services, community social services, and businesses associated with the school and its families, including janitorial services, construction, catering, equipment and supplies, legal, insurance, banking, and accounting. Their contributions to local economies are important. In many inner-city communities, there are significant concentrations of these schools. For example, in Brooklyn, New York, there are approximately 25 schools that serve over 5,000 children. The economic value of independent community-based schools should not be ignored when an area becomes depressed because they lose manufacturing and high-tech companies to suburban jurisdictions, other states, or overseas.

Independent community-based schools are strategic alternatives for quality education. The concept of options in education is critical to many families of color who often are relegated to the worst schools in the urban educational landscape. Policies on school choice should be seen as providing incentives that will increase access to learning and will promote positive and substantive educational outcomes for children, especially students from families with low to moderate incomes.

The Charter School Concept and the Independent Community-Based School

There are many definitions of what constitutes a charter school. The early charter school theorists envisioned "autonomous, results-oriented, publicly funded school of choice that is designed and run by teachers or others under contract with a public sponsor" (Buechler, 1996: 4).

As Buechler explains, a charter school resembles both a private school and a public school. "Like a private school, a charter school is relatively autonomous. It can operate free from most education laws and rules, free from district oversight, and in control of its own curriculum, budget, and personnel. Also, it must attract and keep students, or it will fail....Like a public school, a charter school is funded by taxpayer dollars. It must accept all who enroll, free of charge. It cannot have a religious focus, and it is held accountable, through the charter, by a school district or some other entity."

The charter school movement is one of the fastest growing education reforms in the 1990s. While, however, there may be too few charter schools in operation long enough to draw hard conclusions about their effects, many of them have some of the same challenges as independent community-based schools, with one glaring exception. That is, the independent community-based school must become a public school in order to receive tax dollars equivalent to the state average per-pupil expenditure for each student.

Charter school mandates have become very attractive to the independent community-based schools. The concept also brings into clear focus a high-stakes gamble to build institutional stability that many independent community-based schools have faced for decades. Autonomy and the availability of start-up or operating capital, therefore, are critical issues for the survival of both charter schools and independent schools.

The attributes of a public/private entity have given the charter school idea supporters on both sides of partisan politics. Republicans like them because they give parents greater freedom of choice and the state less control; Democrats favor them because they keep the delivery of educational needs within the bounds of the public school bureaucracy and there is no dire sense of providing tax funds to private entities.

In the past, numerous teachers' unions and school boards resisted the idea of charter schools, but more recently, teachers' unions have started to support the concept. As of 1993, the National Education Association established its own charter school project and is both involved in chartering and examining charter activity coast to coast. The American Federation of Teachers released a report supporting charter schools, with the caveats that they must show improved student achievement and respect for employee bargaining rights (American Federation of Teachers, 1996).

There are five major issues that confront independent community-based schools as they begin to participate in charter school legislative mandates. These issues include:

- the need to address the "independent" mission on which they were founded so as to meet a specific social need in the community;
- a lack of financial resources to keep pace with the needs in targeting the affordability of programs to low to moderate income client groups;
- a need to maintain "smallness" to keep the community needs a priority;
- a need to sustain unique quality in the curricula, pedagogy and assessment and still maintain national recognition for accreditation, testing and evaluation protocols;
- a need to compete for collaborative agreements and partnerships in order to expand their circle of influence in education policy.

Since charters are granted to a school by either local school boards or state boards of education, the independent community-based school must first lose its independence and become a "public school." In addition, charter schools across the country are created differently, depending on state legislation. In 1991, Minnesota passed the nation's first charter school law, and 25 states plus the District of Columbia now have enacted varying degrees of charter school legislation.[2] Charter schools now serve over 105,000 students in 480 schools (The Center for Education Reform, 1996). However, the Center for Policy Studies also points out that at least eight states have chartered 95 percent of these schools (Koldrei, 1996).

In three states, independent community-based schools have applied for charter school status. For the purposes of this discussion, a researcher from the Institute for Independent Education interviewed independent school administrators in Michigan, Massachusetts, and Washington, DC, to discuss the impact that charter school status had on the independent school.

MICHIGAN

In 1993, the State of Michigan enacted its charter school legislation, which proved to be one of the most controversial in the nation. As of 1994, the state has refused to set any limit on the number of charter schools which may be established, seconded only by Georgia in doing so. Michigan is the only chartering state where existing schools, public or private, may be converted into charter schools (Engler 1994: A13). Many states allow schools two to five years to demonstrate results, however Michigan has refused to limit the life of a charter school. The first charter ever granted here was given a 99-year contract, automatically renewable for 99 additional years. Michigan also allows local school boards, boards of intermediate education service districts, community and private colleges, and public and private universities to grant chartering authority.

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[2]The latest edition of *The National Charter School Directory* shows a growth in charter schools, from 1 school in 1992, to 95 schools in 1994, to 480 schools in 1997. The directory is published by The Center for Education Reform, 1001 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 204, Washington, DC 20036.

Recent independent school activity among charters has included three formerly independent community-based schools. They are Detroit's **Aisha Shule/W.E.B. DuBois Preparatory Academy** (founded in 1974) and **Nataki Talibah Schoolhouse** (founded in 1978), and **Sankofa Shule** of East Lansing, Michigan (founded in 1995). Each of these schools has a strong mission to serve African-American families, stressing an interdisciplinary curriculum that supports African-American cultural heritage as a foundation for exposing students to a world view. They have built their curricula on the three major disciplines of language arts, mathematics, and science.

Interviews with the administrators of these three institutions reveal that, so far, they have not been forced to make any changes in curricula, pedagogy, or philosophy. Consequently, the independent mission upon which each school was founded has remained intact.

The overriding factor that pushed these schools into charter status was a lack of financial resources to continue operations. As a consequence of this challenge, several changes in school life have occurred, as noted below.

Aisha Shule/W.E.B. DuBois Preparatory Academy

Since the Detroit School Board adopted its own procedure for charter school districts, the Aisha Shule was chartered under its auspices. It is the oldest of the former independent community-based schools, and it includes kindergarten through grade 12. There have been advantages in assuming charter status for the school, including:

* an increase in student enrollment, which meant that the school was able to increase teacher salaries so that they are now 80 percent of what public school teachers earn;[3]

* an increase in teaching staff to stabilize a 14:1 student/teacher ratio;

* an improvement in the management of the school, due to charter guidelines and incentives;

* an increase in technological advances for the school, because the state provided information available only on computer diskette;

* technical assistance from local and state agencies; and

* an expanded awareness among the school community of legislative activity and the political context for school reform.

Even though the charter school legislation was not designed specifically to improve the plight of African-American students in inner cities, the charter process has been particularly helpful to these students in that it has heightened expectations for student achievement; included an emphasis on the cultural perspective in school reform; enhanced the notion that smaller can be better in the inner city

[3]The school enrollment has increased threefold. There were 63 students before the 1993–94 school year, 120 students in 1994–95, and 210 in 1995–96.

environment, emphasizing smaller class sizes and the school-within-a-school concept; introduced the idea that specialization can be offered sooner in elementary schools; and helped to break down the larger public school traditional system by providing a window of opportunity for community participation.

As a result of charter status, there have been some disadvantages for the school, including the following:

* The school does not have the same sense of family, even though as the charter status matures, it is reported that the school's relationships with students and parents have become more personalized. The lessened sense of family made parents feel somewhat isolated, and the school developed a series of parent seminars to help ease this sense of loss at the school, and these seminars have been successful to date. It was stressed that this process must be continually monitored.

* The school was chartered as a K–12 school, which carries a heavy managerial responsibility for first-time charters. It is important to encourage a longitudinal study of transitional environments as schools shift from independent status to state-sponsored charter status.

* The politically-charged context for operating a charter school had a negative impact on the continuity of school operations. The charter school began its transitional process in the summer of 1994, and the charter was granted in October 1994. There was a restraining order against the charter legislation, and litigation ensued. Parents, however, were instrumental in advancing money to help the school operate throughout the litigation, from January to June 1995, until it received its charter in August 1995.

Nataki Talibah Schoolhouse

The Nataki Talibah Schoolhouse was chartered through Central State Michigan University. Even though it was an independent community-based school, serving K–8 grades, it chose to charter only K–5 grades, leaving grades 6 to 8 in independent status. However, next year, grades 6 to 8 will cease to exist at the school.

This school community believes that charter schools should be utilized as laboratory schools to provide results that can be useful to larger school districts. For independent community-based schools, the charter process can provide financial stability so that educational innovation can be the primary focus. Rising costs made it increasingly difficult to operate the school, and the financial resources of many families were stretched to the limit. With tuition at $6,500, the school became too expensive for most families, especially those that enrolled two or three children in the school at the same time.

One of the biggest challenges noted by the school in its transition from independent to charter status was keeping the family-like ambiance of the school. Since the charter system promotes a lottery process for student recruitment and selection, the school no longer enjoyed the same level of self-selection in enrollment that it previously had developed. With so many new families entering the school at one time through the lottery system, it was necessary for staff to make a concerted effort to preserve the family-like atmosphere. Nevertheless, a charter school conceivably could design its program so as to attract the

type of students it wants to attract.

The experience at Nataki Talibah highlighted a number of advantages in having charter status, including:

* This year, there were no changes in parental involvement, even though the school had less control over parental fund-raising.

* Since the charter process emphasizes assessment for public accountability, this school believes it has an advantage because it had participated regularly with the Independent School Network, which was created by the Institute for Independent Education in 1990 and had sponsored several self-study seminars on school administration, program development, and assessment.

This school believes that a real advantage of the charter process is that it gives more private school administrators the opportunity to share the skills they acquired in their earlier "customer-driven" market and to extend their application into the public arena.

Some of the biggest challenges for the school have been the following:

* Overall, the school has larger classes. In an effort to keep class sizes low, it wants to take only new students at early grades. In addition, this strategy helps to build and maintain the school family.

* Teachers who formerly worked in public school districts do not always share the perspectives or the skills of self-reliance that are necessary for a charter school staff.

Sankofa Shule

Sankofa was an independent community-based school for a brief period of time, but it was inspired by the new charter legislation. Originally, the school charter was denied. However, the coalition of families that united to create the charter, once the law passed in January 1995, stayed together to form a K–2 independent school. They reapplied for the 1996–97 school year and were granted a charter to operate a PK–4 school. They will add a grade each year, up to grade 8.

This school, located in Lansing, Michigan, also is chartered through Central State University. As with the other charters, it operates under the lottery system, granting a $5,500 per student expenditure. It must have certified teachers by grade and must be accredited by the Michigan State Department of Education.

In building its student enrollment, most of its students (79 percent) were below the 50th percentile. It had to negotiate an evaluation strategy that would give the school's program enough time to show student improvement. Evaluation is critical in the charter school process as well as for independent schools. It involves looking not only at comparative test scores but also how the program charts student growth from one level to another within the school environment.

Sankofa believes that the greatest advantage has been the increase in resources, flexibility for new programs, and new technologies and software in the school. Its biggest fear is that the charter program will become big business, again leaving community interests behind. With the potential for access to significant tax dollars, big business and big unions are certain to follow. Therefore, the school does not give up the idea that it may need to return to its status as an independent school one day.

The State of Michigan clearly allows a conducive environment for independent community-based schools to convert to an independent public school academy. All schools have revealed that the state-allotted per-pupil grants have greatly helped in alleviating some of the financial strain so many independent community-based schools face. They all agree that independent schools must be encouraged to do their own research and make thoughtful decisions; and that schools probably could develop at an accelerated rate, if the charter process is accesible and has characteristics that nurture autonomy and the uniqueness of community-based education.

Each school believes that it is in the forefront of providing models for what is coming in the future. Just as quality increases with better resources and an infusion of money, families will rise to the occasion to expect more from their educational system. Beginning a dialogue between schools and parents who are able to choose the school environment for their children will cause parents to be more involved in the education process. As for the independent schools participating in the process, these schools have done well with less, and they should be able to do more with greater resources.

MASSACHUSETTS

As of 1991, the average Boston Scholastic Aptitude Test score was 151 points below the state and national averages. A large number of Boston students (33 percent) do not graduate from high school, and as many as 56 percent drop out in some schools. Of those who do graduate, four in ten cannot read at a ninth grade level.

Such results are not unlike statistics from other large inner city school districts, where thousands of children of color are in schools that do not work for them. This is not only unacceptable but frightening in a country that has made diversity work to its advantage throughout various periods of its history. In an age of supposed increases in educational equity and opportunity, we continue to fail our children by not giving them what they so desperately need and so rightfully deserve—a quality education. For Massachusetts, charter school legislation is seen as part of the solution to this crisis, and it has the potential for yielding great results for children of color. Charter school legislation was passed as a part of the Education Reform Act of 1993, and schools began operating in 1995. No more than 0.75 percent of the total public school population (or 6,000 students) may attend charter schools. Tuition payments vary depending on where the children live. The state of Massachusetts has capped the number of charter schools at 25, with 15 of those already operating. This state offers no direct role for school districts, which has strained many relationships between state and local districts. Some districts have come up with their own experiments, such as the Boston School Committee.

Two-thirds of Boston charter school students are African American or Hispanic/Latino American, and one-third of the charter schools target so-called "at-risk" or low-income students. Although the data are still incomplete, the average "special needs" population in Massachusetts charter schools is 10 percent or more of the total enrollment.

The Boston public school system is chartering through a system known as "pilot" schools. So far, five pilot schools have been launched. However, one independent community-based school, Paige Academy, located in Roxbury, was not allowed to take advantage of the pilot school initiative. Subsequent proposals from the school and protest letters have encouraged the Board to reconsider this school's participation.

Paige Academy

Paige Academy has been in operation since 1975. Much like the independent schools in Michigan, Paige takes the position that recent legislation for charter and pilot schools provides some relief from the financial strain on their families and can maximize the operation of a quality educational program. The school program starts with nursery through grade 6, and it enrolls 150 students.

Taking advantage of the pilot school initiative, the administrators of Paige spent one year gathering information and going through the application process, only to be rejected. Despite their very successful school program, both at the local and state levels of student achievement, one of the main reasons for their rejection at that time is believed to be the limited number of charters allowed by the legislative mandate. Paige reapplied for the 1996–97 school year, but the committee responsible for charter initiatives in Boston did not recommend Paige be granted a charter because its African-centered curriculum was not what the committee considered "multicultural."

It should be noted that the concept of the multicultural curriculum was created in the United States for the benefit of schools with predominantly white enrollment, and it was designed to help them become more diverse in their approach to the curriculum. However, it is being utilized in some recent school reform efforts to halt the participation of African-American independent schools in the policy debate and preclude them from standing as viable alternatives to mainstream education.

Paige is contesting the claim that its curriculum is not multicultural by explaining that the Paige curriculum is rooted in the history of Africa and African-American people and that it acknowledges and respects the history and accomplishments of all people. This school family believes that its rejection is an attempt to define Paige Academy as having a "teaching fringe curriculum" and that this is yet another attempt by those who prefer the status quo to isolate and marginalize this inner city school community.

There are major differences between pilot school initiatives and charter schools, especially in the amounts of money attached to the per-pupil cost and the incentives for professional teachers. For example, a pilot school status would provide $6,000 per student, but charter school status would bring $8,000. In addition, most charter schools are managed by professional teachers, often to develop schools within schools, whereas pilot schools offer groups other than teacher unions the opportunity to create schools.

The pilot school guidelines also state that all teachers are to be paid union wages and benefits and that all teachers must be union certified. At Paige, this means that salaries would be much higher than they currently are. The guidelines defeat the purpose of granting the school $1,500 more per child, per year than Paige now collects from tuition. The additional revenue is offset by salary increases mandated by collective bargaining, resulting in bureaucratic entanglement from union protocols that are as pervasive as they are in public schools. Although pilot schools are supervised by the mayor's office, independent schools can participate only with the consent of the unions. Consequently, the unions are able to dominate the design of alternative choices in this policy alternative. It highlights more teacher-control reform than parent-control reform efforts.

Paige Academy administrators believe that the process of proposal development is an important step for independent community-based schools. In addition, the reflection and justification of programmatic goals in which they engaged over the past year was valuable to them. They believe that independent community-based schools should be encouraged to become more involved in the charter school or pilot school processes through researching their options and becoming less isolated in the education reform debate. They feel that schools need to keep their base of independence but be more flexible in seeking ways to collaborate with other program innovations. The big challenge is that more schools should seek accreditation in different places, reflecting the need to consider different situations and school settings. They believe that independent community-based schools have a very important role in charter school experiments. The founders believe that these reforms are changing the course of education, and independent schools will need to be less rigid to participate in the reforms.

WASHINGTON, DC

The D.C. Public Schools charter legislation was created by the U.S. Congress, with assistance for implementation from the U.S. Department of Education and the D.C. Board of Education. It enables existing public schools to convert to charter schools when a majority of parents and teachers agree to do so, and it also allows independent schools or new schools created by parents, educators, cultural organizations or the government to start charter schools. Up to 20 charter schools can be created by two agencies: either by the D.C. Board of Education or by a group appointed jointly by the mayor and the U.S. Department of Education. More recently, however, the D.C. Board of Education has been stripped of many of its powers by the newly-formed District of Columbia Financial Responsibility and Management Assistance Authority. Congress created this board to help the District government with its management and fiscal responsibilities.

Three independent community-based schools applied for charter school status in the District. They are Roots Activity Learning Center, Ideal Learning Center, and the Marcus Garvey School. The D.C. Board of Education accepted the application of the Marcus Garvey School in the summer of 1996, even though this school occupied no building or enrolled any students at the time the charter was granted. This section on Washington, D.C., concentrates on the application process for the Roots Activity Learning Center, one of the member schools in the Institute's Independent Education Network.

Roots Activity Learning Center

The Roots Activity Learning Center, established in 1977, submitted a charter application in response to a call from a member of the Board of Education who wanted to expand opportunities for independent schools into efforts to reform public schools. Roots already had been highlighted as the school that had nourished a budding national merit scholar who had a perfect SAT score. Roots expected that charter school status would enable it to have a greater impact through community service and enable it to demonstrate that its innovative program could become a model in the policy reform debate on charter school management and student achievement.

Roots applied for a charter limited to 50 students from the D.C. community who would participate in the charter school experiment. These students would be drawn from grades 1 to 8, with the school's regular clientele having the right of first refusal and only five new students joining the independent community at Roots. It was testing the water carefully, not putting the entire institution in jeopardy. In other words, Roots attempted to design a charter component that would operate in conjunction with an already effective infrastructure and would maximize the delivery of quality instruction.

The District of Columbia denied the request for a charter on the basis that Roots failed to include the total school program, even though there is no statement in the legislation which states that an entire school must fall under the charter legislation.

Roots considers that the charter school debate is a multi-edged challenge for independent community-based schools. First, the loss of independence is a matter of grave concern, because much of the school's success in student achievement depends on flexible program development to meet the changing needs of children. Second, if public school advocates are serious about the effective education of African-American young people, they must be willing to collaborate with independent schools in designing programs that will not dismantle the effective working of an independent school but, rather, enhance opportunities for independent schools to work with children in the public school system. Third, Roots did not want to be distracted by the bureaucratic details of charter innovation to the point that they would destabilize their existing operation, even though the charter would require Roots to become more involved in policy innovation and community outreach. Fourth, by stretching its resources too thin, the school's families, the size of its building, and its staff could no longer function as an effective unit.

Public school advocates likened the Roots charter proposal to a voucher experiment. This analogy was made in the context of an earlier unrelated attempt by others in the District of Columbia to introduce vouchers for low-income families. The ensuing voucher debate had delayed passage of the proposed District budget in the U.S. House of Representatives, before it finally was withdrawn. The analogy, although inappropriate and inaccurate, was effective in ensuring the rejection of the Roots application.

The Impact of Vouchers and Contractual Service Agreements

Most people believe that every American deserves equal access to opportunities. To make this ideal more meaningful, several states have enacted legislation which provides vouchers—or tax-supported grants—so that students, especially those from low-income families, can attend the school of their choice. With vouchers, independent schools can receive tax dollars, while remaining part of the private sector. America, as a "land of plenty," traditionally has offered greater opportunities for citizens from middle-income and upper-income families to choose private schools, but vouchers enable parents from low-income families to have similar options. A related concept, contractual service agreements, enables public schools to send some of their students to independent schools, usually for the purpose of relieving overcrowding, providing smaller learning environments, or assisting with students whose behavior is disruptive in traditional classrooms; the independent school receives a fee for the service under a contract with the state or local government. These agreements provide opportunities for families to experience firsthand the effects of parents being able to choose where their children receive an education.

The idea of supporting parental choice has helped to make the use of vouchers and contractual service agreements more palatable concepts for many people, who otherwise would object to the distribution of public money to private institutions.

Vouchers

Most voucher plans provide approximately $2,500 toward tuition, as is the case in Wisconsin and Ohio. Many opponents claim that this figure would not cover tuition at most private schools, but these arguments are given in the context of schools that charged $8,000 to $10,000 per year for each student. A majority of independent schools and parochial schools charge much less.

U.S. Government statistics reveal that the average tuition at many private and/or independent schools falls between $200 and $2,000 per year. In 1991, two-thirds of all private schools—about 18,000 schools nationwide—charged $2,500 or less for tuition, with approximately 19 percent of those schools charging less than $1,000.

Traditionally, two partisan political camps, the conservatives and the liberals, have had prominence in this tug-of-war of school choice, although a third, the libertarians, are not far behind. The conservative position believes that tax-funded vouchers would champion parental choice and promote greater competition outside of the public school monopoly. A more liberal position, which is supported by a large organized group of stakeholders of teacher unions and school administrators, is that tax-funded vouchers will siphon funds from public schools and destroy these democratic institutions. In other words, vouchers ultimately will create a two-tier education system, leaving poor students and students with disabilities in declining public schools. Those who have a more libertarian view believe that there will be a loss of school autonomy when government funds began to flow into private/or independent schools. Yet others, who do not want to be pigeonholed in any one camp, believe that vouchers could

provide more opportunities for all types of students and their learning styles (Ottolenghi and Owens, 1994). This would be especially true if more policy alternatives involved a variety of learning environments, in both the public and private sectors, where independent community-based schools could have a significant role in providing options in education..

However, more traditional political waters provide strong currents for the independent community-based school. These schools depend on strong parental choice, they battle each day for a competitive edge with inner city public schools, and they overwhelmingly address the social and academic needs of low to moderate income families. They do have concerns for their independence, but in a multi-billion-dollar education empire, there is a grave need for institutional stability. The tax base in many of the communities they serve is highly dependent on bureaucratic controls that put a strong hold on the "efficient use" of public funds through economies of scale. Consequently, many of these schools that are responding to the social and academic needs of inner city youth are caught in the middle. They need to keep their independence, for that has afforded them the ability to respond to the needs of the community in a timely fashion. On the other hand, they must continue to strive for institutional development so that they can continue to prepare young people to participate in the global economy. These positive goals will require more money than can be generated by modest tuition alone. Many of the families that patronize these schools could not afford to pay for this alternative, if they had to pay for the actual cost of education or what the cost is likely to become in a more competitive global economy.

These schools often educate youngsters for one-half of the cost of public schools or one-fifth of the cost at elite private schools. Often, the shortfall is made up in lack of facilities, meager salaries, innovative personnel and in-kind services. These schools must continue as a community with common interests and organized by shared strategic goals if they are going to remain competitive. This means that more unity among these schools is critical and coalition-building with other organizations must become a priority outreach strategy.

Community-based schools still participate in a multi-billion capitalistic venture, and they cannot be denied a fair share of that market if they are expected to prepare American youngsters for the global marketplace. As discussed earlier, these schools are developing leaders, and they are stimulating innovation and economic revitalization in many urban communities. The strategic importance of educational progress of many African American and Hispanic/Latino, Native American, Asian-American youth can benefit from these institutions.

The persistent thrust of these schools to undergird the schooling experience of these students of color with a community's belief system forges an American democratic ideal not unlike that of past educational eras. For example, Catholic immigrants to America were pushed to forge an educational system that had an American character, even though there were specific religious values to maintain. Given the diversity of cultures, languages and ethnicities that define the American character of schools in the U.S., the challenge is to help families have greater access to high educational standards through a diverse set of options, not with fewer options, and to promote greater accountability within all of the schools serving the American public.

Several state legislatures across the country have passed voucher mandates, but no two proposals are alike. Each must be examined to determine the maximum benefits it provides for independent community-based schools and their families. This report will address the progress being made in two states: Wisconsin and Ohio.

Wisconsin

Milwaukee, Wisconsin, is the first home of a nationally-recognized voucher plan which was designed for children in low-income families. Spearheaded by Democratic Representative Annette Polly Williams in 1990 and signed into law by Republican Governor Tommy Thompson, the plan allows up to 1,000 low-income Milwaukee students to use an annually adjusted amount of state funds ($2,967 for the 1992–93 school year) to attend a private, non-sectarian school of their choice. The Milwaukee experiment has been repeatedly challenged in court and was initially declared unconstitutional. Since the landmark 1992 Wisconsin Supreme Court ruling in favor of voucher, however, the visibility of this program has increased.

Independent schools accepting vouchers were limited to accepting no more than 49 percent of their total student body through vouchers, and families participating in the program were allowed to have incomes up to 185 percent of the poverty line. Up to 1,000 students were allowed to participate in the program as a whole, representing approximately 1 percent of the public school population in Milwaukee. Only one-third of the authorized voucher seats were utilized in the first year.

Recent legislation attempted to expand the original concept by including religiously-affiliated schools. In August 1995, a court issued an injunction against this expansion, in response to lawsuits by the American Civil Liberties Union and the Milwaukee Teachers Education Association, People for the American Way, and the Milwaukee Public School Administrators' and Supervisors' Council. The ACLU challenged the inclusion of sectarian schools in the choice program, and the others contended that the program was becoming too expansive and was no longer an experimental program. The State Supreme Court deadlocked on the issue of including religious schools, and the lawsuit was remanded to the lower court.

Wisconsin State Judge Paul Higginbotham lifted the injunction in August 1996, without approving the inclusion of religious schools. In early 1997, he ruled that the state could not include religious schools in its voucher program. He stated that "school choice may in fact be sound public policy, especially considering the sad plight of the Milwaukee Public Schools system," but expanding choice to cover religious schools violates the Wisconsin State Constitution because it "compels Wisconsin citizens of varying religious faiths to support schools with their tax dollars that proselytize students and attempt to inculcate them with beliefs contrary to their own" (*Daily Report Card*, 1997).

Other important changes occurring in the expanded choice program included an increase in the number of participating students, up to 15,000 as opposed to the original 1,500; up to 100 percent of choice students could be enrolled in a school, which meant that private sector philanthropy through scholarships to students was not needed; students in kindergarten to grade 3 did not need to be enrolled in the Milwaukee public school in the previous year; and uniform accounting standards with an independent audit were required to ensure greater management control. In addition, the recent decision of Judge

Higgin botham said that the Wisconsin Constitution "prohibits private or local bills that are enacted as part of the State budget..." Consequently, other changes were not permitted that would have allowed further expansion of the Milwaukee parental choice program.

The new change in the law could have put many independent community-based schools at greater risk of losing their independence, because schools could be 100 percent dependent on choice dollars. The thrust for greater accountability helped all types of schools to stabilize their infrastructure and maximize the delivery of quality programs. However, the litigation will continue and may well be heard again by the State Supreme Court.

A number of the schools in the Milwaukee initiative have worked with the Institute for Independent Education for many years and supported activities of the Independent Education Network, including Harambee Community School, Urban Day School, Bruce Guadaloupe, and the Ojibwe School. One school, Juanita Virgil Academy, was overwhelmed by the impact of the initial choice mandate when its enrollment doubled at a time when its administrative and management controls were too weak to support its growth, and the school closed.

The Milwaukee experience highlights the need for a broader approach to voucher initiatives so as not to place institutions in untenable positions or leave parents and students in jeopardy. Policy makers considered money and parental choice as the key issues, without giving adequate thought to the institutional infrastructure for delivering a quality program. A serious regulatory review in the future should examine the schools for evidence of self-study, administration, program development, effective instructional practice, the use of assessment to improve teaching and learning, and accountability to the institution's constituents.

Ohio

Ohio is the second state in the nation to enact a state-sponsored voucher program. However, this mandate allows children from low-income families to attend private or religious schools. The program enacted in 1995 provides $2,250 per voucher for the youth who participate in the program. In Cleveland, 1,500 students in kindergarten to grade 3 received pilot vouchers and were eligible to receive tutorial assistance from a $5 million appropriation by the State. Over 50 schools took part in the Cleveland pilot voucher program.

This law was challenged on its constitutionality by the Ohio affiliates of the National Education Association, the American Federation of Teachers, the American Civil Liberties Union, and People for the American Way. The Ohio Court of Claims upheld the constitutionality of the law under the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and the Ohio Constitution.

A highly successful businessman took a creative approach to independent community-based education. He wanted to develop a system of schools that could meet the needs of all the families that he expected would want to leave public schools. He helped to create a nonprofit tax-exempt organization called Hope for Cleveland's Children, which launched Hope Schools.

In contrast to the corporate model of the Hope Schools is the Hough-Brooks Academy for Higher Learning, established by a neighborhood community organization founded by City Councilwoman Fannie Mae Lewis. At least 300 Hough community residents travelled to Columbus, Ohio, to demonstrate their support for the proposed voucher/scholarship program during the time this proposal needed community support.

While the Hope Schools opened in September 1996, the Hough-Brooks community school could not find sufficient resources to begin operating. In this sense, Hough-Brooks represents a national phenomenon. Many independent community-based schools do not have sufficient revenue generated from the community, which would provide an anchor for capitalizing the institution. In addition, corporate resources or sponsoring philanthropists generally do not work with existing community-inspired structures in America's inner cities to promote the school choice program. This trend to ignore community-based institutions in corporate philanthropy is discused more thoroughly in the section on corporate philanthropy.

Contractual Service Agreements

A second strategy for developing greater awareness of independent community-based schools is through the use of contractual service agreements. The Varnett School in Houston, Texas, which serves youngsters from preschool through middle school, has a contractual agreement with the Houston Independent School District to enroll more than 100 students. Tuition at this regionally-accredited school is $3,500 per year. The purpose of this contractual agreement is to promote quality education and to reduce overcrowding in the Houston public schools

In contrast to small organizations, such as Varnett Academy, large corporations also participate in contractual service agreements. Sylvan Learning Systems and Education Alternatives, for instance, have become active corporate partners with several public school districts.

The Houston Public School Board approved the contractual arrangement with Varnett in September 1996. Previously, the school enrolled 125 students, and the contract increased enrollment by 80 percent. Nevertheless, parents were delighted to know that the students would receive greater attention by being in a classroom with 15 to 20 students, instead of 30 to 35 students.

It could be said that contractual service agreements are not truly parental choice initiatives, because the school is chosen by competition for a contract. However, the administrator and founder of Varnett Academy says that it serves to show many families that there is an alternative to public education and provides them an opportunity to test the waters. While the public school system has the advantage of selecting the youngsters who will participate in the program, the independent school can demonstrate how a well-balanced learning environment can maximize student achievement. Moreover, Varnett has an absentee rate of 1 percent, every student gets instruction in Spanish and must learn how to use a computer. Students also have basic courses in mathematics, language, reading, and geography.

Varnett is strategically suited for such a partnership because it has an existing facility of 10,000 square feet, with a capacity for 300 students. Houston school officials appear responsive to the idea that there will be a greater need in the future for contracts with independent schools. The Houston model also is similar to an idea that surfaced in New York City.[4]

Provided that the terms of a contract to provide services do not significantly alter the character of an organization, independent schools may find that contracts may offer greater independence than becoming a charter school or having their enrollment capped by voucher legislation.

[4] Mayor Guiliani accepted a long-standing proposal from the Catholic school system to transfer 100 low-achieving students from inner-city public schools to Catholic schools to ease overcrowding. Congressman Floyd Flake, an African-American from the Sixth Congressional District, suggested in a news release that African-American independent schools should be included in this pilot.

The Unfulfilled Potential of Corporate Philanthropy

Private enterprise is increasing its role in sponsoring vouchers in the form of scholarships to low and moderate income families. This could have a significant impact on the operation of independent community-based schools. As more voucher initiatives have been delayed in state legislatures, corporate philanthropy once again is taking a commanding lead in helping many families take advantage of enrollment opportunities in independent community-based schools.

This prevailing attitude of corporate philanthropy to take the lead when government is slow to act has considerable historical precedent, especially toward independent community-based schools. However, with only few exceptions, corporate philanthropy probably represents far greater potential than reality for these schools. There is a dire need for corporate America, through its philanthropic agencies, to promote greater innovation through its support of independent community-based schools. Studies have shown that there has been little direct support from corporations to community-based schools.

Historical Precedent

The most prominent example is the work and legacy of Booker T. Washington, the African-American educator who founded Tuskeegee Institute. The inspiration for Tuskeegee came from Hampton Institute, which was founded by General Samuel Chapman Armstrong, a European American from the North who was a Civil War veteran. The Hampton-Tuskeegee model for African-American education became the centerpiece for corporate giving and the prototype for training African Americans in the philosophy of industrial education.

This vision of what African Americans should be, how education should train "the hand as well as the mind," captivated several generations of Americans. It also has had a major role in determining the fate of both public and independent schools that serve African Americans. However, there has been very little discussion of how the Hampton-Tuskeegee model has had an impact on contemporary independent community-based education, which is focused on African Americans maintaining control over their own institutions.

Booker T. Washington became the architect who created a network of independent community-based schools throughout the South, including such states as Mississippi, Georgia, and North Carolina. Each school that evolved included the word "industrial" in its name to alert funding sources that they agreed with the Hampton-Tuskeegee philosophy. Even schools that did not believe totally in the industrial curriculum adopted the title in order to garner more private financial support. It is not surprising then that when independent schools wanted to expand into offering a more solid academic curriculum, they had great difficulty in attracting corporate philanthropic support.

Energetic women like Charlotte Hawkins Brown and Nannie Helen Burroughs developed schools to provide academic subjects, rather than merely industrial subjects. They also met with considerable resistance from corporate philanthropists who were interested in supporting their schools. While these schools provided specific training, such as in nursing and secretarial skills, their founders also developed ancillary businesses that were attached to the school, or the schools provided health services to the community. The Nannie Helen Burroughs School in Washington, DC, today is a co-educational institution with a prekindergarten to 6th grade curriculum. This school has a legacy that responded to the needs of African American women and girls with a trade and professional school curriculum at the turn of the century. Nannie Helen Burroughs was proud to say that "This school was conceived, developed, managed, owned and controlled by Negro Christian women." The school's curriculum was both academic and industrial for junior high, high school and junior college level, as well as courses in trade such as business and secretarial training and beauty culture.

Other schools, such as Piney Woods Country Life School, which was founded in 1909 and is operating today in Mississippi, exemplify independent community-based schools that have a rural base but have students from urban communities across the country and from numerous foreign countries. The curriculum at Piney Woods blends the industrial concept of the work ethic with authentic college preparation. Each student has a job in the school's printing shop or farm but also must perform well in academic subjects and be competitive for college placement. While other schools in the Hampton-Tuskeegee model are considered successful, only Piney Woods has an endowment.

During the 1940s corporate philanthropy took a drastic turn away from its support of the institution-building at independent community-based schools; it focused more on diverting individual African American students to predominately white private schools. Efforts such as A Better Chance and The Student Black Fund were nonprofit organizations that searched for and provided tutorial assistance to African American students so that they would be better prepared for entry into the elite independent schools controlled by Whites. Even today, few corporate philanthropies will support tuition assistance at independent African-American schools.

In the era of desegregation, independent community-based schools also lost a critical mass of their client base to desegregated public schools and to elite private schools, with corporate philanthropy supporting both of these options heavily. Many families believed that predominantly White schools had the resources to prepare their youngsters better for college.

Corporate philanthropy provides millions of dollars to public and other private schools at the elementary and secondary level, thereby giving it significant influence in education policymaking. Today's voucher debate has helped to revitalize private voucher programs through tuition scholarships, some of which may be applied to independent community-based schools. African American students are being helped by tuition scholarships to attend independent and parochial schools, and the potential for corporate philanthropy to have a significant role in the support of community-based education once more is apparent.

However, in the past, there has been an uneasy alliance between corporate supporters as donors to independent schools controlled by African Americans. Often, the corporate donors have not recognized the push for self-reliance and self-determination in education by African Americans themselves. The

irony of this less than close alliance and understanding is that independent community-based schools represent some of the best examples of the American free enterprise system at work.

This zeal for independence was best described by William Channing Gannet, who said: "What [African Americans] desire is assistance without control" (Anderson, 1988: 5). Earlier, many Northern missionaries at the turn of the 20th century considered the ideal of self-determination to be ingratitude, while many upper and middle class planters in the South considered it downright belligerent. Today, corporate investors generally eschew institutions that are controlled by African Americans. Instead, they tend to pour millions of dollars into institutions outside of a community to control the delivery of services that are established to meet the needs of the African-American community. In other instances, there appears to be a specific strategy to keep the long arm of assistance firmly anchored outside the community through policy think tanks, university research or scholarship funds, instead of through institutions that are rooted in the communities themselves. It is as if corporate investors fear that providing assistance to existing community organizations, without control in the hands of the donors themselves, will not benefit the national, regional, or local political economy.

Contemporary Challenges and Needs

Over the years, independent community-based schools were regarded as important resources for the African American communities in which they were located. In some instances, they were places where industrial concepts could shift the economic base for African Americans, as can be seen in schools like Lauringburg Institute in North Carolina. The founders of this school were students of Booker T. Washington and formed the initial network of independent community-based schools in the Hampton-Tuskeegee model. Other schools, like Boggs Academy in Georgia and Snow Hill Institute in Alabama, helped to keep rural communities socially and economically viable.

Today, independent schools have their independence challenged by charter school and voucher legislation. The critical problem still remains: how to help independent schools develop a solid economic base for survival.

There are several examples where the corporate hand of philanthropy has tried to reinvent the wheel, rather than cooperate with existing community school-help initiatives. These initiatives often are generated by struggling institutions that are designing self-help solutions to many of the same educational problems that plague our public schools. These programs are working, but their value to current educational reform policies generally is overlooked.

These independent schools are important and deserve greater recognition from corporate investors because they are part of the infrastructure in many communities, and they can generate economic and social stability in those communities.

One example of corporate philanthropy was realized for a brief period through a grand experiment in Chicago. Several corporations provided $2 million to start an elementary school to show public schools how the private sector could improve the quality of education through school management, teaching methods, and presumably high-quality curricula. The corporate school idea lasted about three years, but it was disturbing because it again relied on a group of outside experts to run the school. It almost

completely ignored independent community-based schools in the same neighborhood.

A less intrusive program, which gives parents more control, is the highly-organized network of local private voucher programs called the Children's Educational Opportunity Foundation of America.[5] It is organized through two national programs and nearly 30 local and regional voucher/scholarship programs. Recent statistics reveal that there are 9,918 students participating in the programs and 16,580 on waiting lists (CEO/America, 1996). Other tuition assistance programs enrolled another 10,906. Clearly, the demand is greater than the services.

With increased backing by corporate sponsors and wealthy individuals, this network has a theme of "reaching America with educational choice." Many of these programs were founded by conservatives who believe that the voucher concept should not die with the lack of legislative initiatives from the states. They have sought alliances with some parents at independent community-based schools, attempting to build a constituency that might help conservatives with voucher fights in coming years. The obvious problem with this program is that it gives recognition to parents at the schools on the input end, but it fails to give any recognition to the institution-building efforts of the school personnel that help to manage these institutions.

A major foundation, the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, has contributed nearly $10 million in programs and projects to promote private school vouchers and school choice (Sommerfeld, 1996: 16). One of the largest beneficiary of this investment is the Partners Advancing Values in Education (PAVE) in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, the home of one of the two successful voucher mandates in the nation.

Clearly, the main objective of corporate philanthropy within the last few years has been to help speed up the access of families to options in education, either through elite private schools or established parochial schools. A more recent effort is to help families in need to get more access to smaller independent community-based schools. This effort put greater control in the hands of parents to choose whatever learning environment that they feel is best for their children.

The impact of these new opportunities for independent community-based schools could mean greater collaboration with business partners to increase school resources. More parents will be looking for more information on these schools. Questions about quality of instruction and school management will be integral to opportunities for more access by families. Whether these schools will be accredited, and by whom, will continue to be a critical issue.

The answer to how these schools and families can maintain consistent interest in these schools must lie in the schools' long-range plans for economic viability. To this end, the schools and their families must market their institutions more vigorously to their other neighborhood families, and they must inform and enlist community partners—such as churches, mosques, businesses, and the general public—to support quality education at these schools.

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[5]The Children's Educational Opportunity Foundation of America publishes a newsletter, *Voucher Voice*, and other reports. Its address is P.O. Box 1543, Bentonville, Arkansas 72712. Telephone (501) 273–6957.

Corporations should take their rightful place in implementing these essential efforts. Philosophically, both corporations and community-based independent schools are driven by the free enterprise spirit of doing for one's self. Both believe in the right to establish institutions and the right to develop and influence policies relevant to their existence. Both strive hard to achieve exemplary results. Furthermore, corporations and community-based independent schools ultimately share a mutual interest: developing human beings to their highest potential. The schools are committed to teaching their students the disciplines that lead to self-confidence, integrity, and cutting-edge thinking—attributes critical to corporate success in the global marketplace. Corporations, with their philanthropical support, should enthusiastically seek to reap the unique dividends African-American independent education can offer.

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